



ADS CENTER

Resource Center to Address
Discrimination and Stigma

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN WHERE WE ARE AND WHERE WE NEED TO BE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration
Center for Mental Health Services

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Summary

**The Kids on the Block, Inc., Columbia,
MD, USA**

Brief Description

The Kids on the Block (KOB) educational puppet theatre company researches, develops and performs live programs addressing a wide range of topics, including children's mental health. Founded in 1977, KOB has become a leader in educational programs for children. During performances, puppet characters talk to children with humor, candor, and sensitivity about topics like disability awareness, social concerns, educational differences and medical issues. In the process, they create awareness and understanding in an effective and fun way. Over 42 program topics have been developed and over 1,500 troupes are performing in the U.S. and internationally. KOB, Inc., in Columbia, Maryland, is the national headquarters for all KOB affiliate troupes.

Situation

KOB was approached by several mental health organizations in the early 1990s with a problem. While children's physical needs were being identified and met, their mental health needs were being neglected. Many children held stigmatizing views that mirrored those of their parents, associating only negative thoughts toward mental health services. Children actively using mental health services often were teased and socially isolated.

Solution

In 1996 through a collaborative sponsorship with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), and the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH), The Kids on the Block helped launch the *Caring for Each and Every Child's Mental Health: Communities Together Campaign*. By performing scripted material focusing on the issues of depression and mental health services, KOB aims to educate the general public by demonstrating that caring for one's mental health is as important as caring for one's physical health. Puppet characters role-model positive interactions with one another by discussing issues, such as seeking services or talking about depression, and then working through conflict in a positive way. Following each performance, children are given the opportunity to ask questions of the characters. The welcoming medium of puppetry encourages young people to ask puppets things they often feel too embarrassed to ask a real person. The program also includes follow-up activities for educators and other professionals.

Results

After its initial launch, The KOB Program on Children's Mental Health was utilized as an outreach tool by 28 mental health associations and other community organizations in 36 States, Canada, and Ireland. Presently, 155 organizations are educating children in their communities through these performance. Programmatic activity has stretched far beyond the original four year scope of the original campaign, testifying to the powerful and sustainable messages it communicates.

Contact

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The SAMHSA ADS Center is a program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services.

About the SAMHSA ADS Center

SAMHSA's Resource Center to Address Discrimination and Stigma (ADS Center) helps people design, implement and operate programs that reduce discrimination and stigma associated with mental illnesses. With the most up-to-date research and information, the ADS Center helps individuals, organizations and governments counter such discrimination and stigma in the community, in the workplace, and in the media.

Subscribe to receive our electronic quarterly news and event update, *Mental Health News You Can Use...*, by sending an e-mail to stopstigma@samhsa.hhs.gov, or by calling an ADS Center representative at 800-540-0320. To comment on the materials included in this document, please send e-mail to stopstigma@samhsa.hhs.gov, or write a letter to Resource Center to Address Discrimination and Stigma Associated with Mental Illness; Informational Updates; 11420 Rockville Pike; Rockville, MD 20852. To unsubscribe from our electronic distribution list using the subscribed e-mail account, click [here](#). To unsubscribe your address from a different e-mail account, send a message to Majordomo@listserve.shs.net with the following command in the message body: unsubscribe stopstigma [Your E-mail Address].

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